



columns

obituary

Professor John Case Nemiah

Formerly Professor
Emeritus of Psychiatry,
Dartmouth Medical
School, New Hampshire,
USA

Born in Cheshire, Connecticut, on 30 November 1918, John Nemiah moved to Hanover as a young boy when his father, Royal C. Nemiah, became Professor in the Classics Department at Dartmouth College. He attended the Hotchkiss School, and received his AB (in Classics) from Yale and his MD degree (American Osteopathic Association) from Harvard Medical School in 1943. He was an intern in medicine on the Fourth (Harvard) Medical Service at Boston City Hospital, and completed 1 year of residency in psychiatry at New Haven Hospital before joining the military near the end of the Second World War. He served in the US Army Medical Corps until early 1947, holding the rank of Captain at discharge. At that point, he completed a second internship (in neurology) at Boston City Hospital, and then further training in psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital and in psychoanalysis at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute.

He spent the early years of his academic career at the Massachusetts General Hospital, becoming Acting Chief of Service from 1965 to 1967, before moving to the Beth Israel Hospital in Boston as Psychiatrist-in-Chief and Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Upon his retirement from the Beth Israel and Harvard in 1985, he returned to his roots and became Professor of Psychiatry at Dartmouth, and Professor Emeritus in 2002.

Few psychiatrists accomplished more in their careers or were more respected and loved than John Nemiah. Under his leadership, Beth Israel's Department of Psychiatry flourished. His internationally acclaimed book, *Foundations of Psychopathology*, published in 1961, continues to be the gold standard for understanding dynamic psychotherapy. His long and distinguished tenure as editor of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (1978–1993) set a high bar for journal editors: he was legendary for the



encouraging handwritten notes he sent to authors explaining the reasons for rejection and suggesting ways to improve their manuscript. New journal editors and new department leaders regularly sought his wisdom as they began their positions.

John Nemiah was the consummate academic – a gifted teacher, a wonderful writer and a talented clinician. He published over 140 scientific articles, and brought to them his own particular, highly fluid style. His contributions to psychiatric theory and practice were enormous, and related to the importance of emotion, personality and relationships in the development and treatment of common psychiatric problems – anxiety disorders, dissociative conditions and alexithymia. He was nationally recognised for his pioneering work in psychoanalysis, psychosomatic medicine, psychodynamic psychotherapy and the history of psychiatry.

John was honoured and received awards from every major psychiatric organisation in America. Additionally, he was elected President of the American College of Psychiatrists, the American College of Psychoanalysts, the Benjamin Rush Society, and the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry.

Towards the end of an already illustrious career, during which he had established himself as one of the 'wise men' of American psychiatry, he chose to come

home to Hanover in 1985 to join the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry. At Dartmouth, while he continued as Editor of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, his true passion as a mentor and teacher of students, residents and faculty (ourselves included) quickly emerged. He never let his national stature interfere with establishing strong relationships with even very inexperienced residents. He had the true teacher's gift for making others feel sufficiently at ease to share the details of their work without embarrassment. That quality, along with his warmth, gentle humour, depth of knowledge, respect for his students and ability to give them the confidence to work with 'difficult' patients made him a highly sought-after supervisor and mentor. For many years, every resident selected him as a supervisor, and past supervisees always seemed to want 'one more year with John'. He was ever accessible, and he was delighted when someone sought his help with a challenging case.

Even as his eyesight failed, and when he became Professor Emeritus, he continued to participate actively in the life of the Department. He attended grand rounds and other department events, inspiring his colleagues with his determined refusal to let physical adversity dampen his spirit of curiosity and caring about others. The department's Nemiah Library, so named in his honour, a place for intellectual enquiry and seminars, will keep alive his legacy for future generations of Dartmouth trainees and faculty.

He was married to the late Muriel (Harris) Nemiah Geist for 30 years and to the late Margarete Nemiah for 32 years. He is survived by a daughter, Ann Conway, two sons, James and David, a step-daughter, Elaine Cohen, and eight grandchildren.

John Case Nemiah's kindness, warmth, intellectual rigour and wonderful sense of humour enriched all whom he touched. We were fortunate that this son of Dartmouth came home to share the last 24 years of his extraordinary life with us. We will miss him terribly.

**Alan Green, Peter Silberfarb
and Robert Racusin**

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